

Plastic *Fantastic*

Josh Davis devises a crafty damselfly.



The fly was cast ahead of this cruising fish and twitched as it approached.

I'm a tragic for craft stores but always feel a little out of place with my arms full of fake fur, beads and feather boas. Still, the looks have never been quite as bad as the day I bought fake fingernails and nail polish. All in the name of fly tying. Using these sorts of materials gets me my fair share of disapproving looks amongst fly tiers too. The JD Damsel is the unholy child of just such a shopping trip; born out of plastic tubes and blind cord it looks obscene, but it fills a niche that most other flies cannot and for this reason it'll always have its place.

DAMSELS & DRAGONS

Damselflies are related to dragonflies and are associated with almost all freshwater systems around Australia. Their nymphs range in size and colour but are all aquatic ambush predators with large eyes and strong legs located just behind the head. Both damsels

and dragons are Olympic-medal winning fish catchers, but are as different as pro-wrestlers and gymnasts when it comes to their build and behaviour under the water.

Dragonfly nymphs (mudeyes) are short, squat and relatively sedentary with gills located inside their body. Damsel nymphs on the other hand have longer, more slender bodies with long tail-like gills at the end. They are much more mobile than their dragonfly brethren and swim with a lashing motion to seize their prey or avoid becoming prey for others. Damsel nymphs usually swim in short bursts at a slight upward angle and then slowly settle while they rest. This swimming motion is fairly vigorous but only carries them a short distance. Most damsel nymph imitations try to replicate this swimming action, but they do a much less convincing job of representing the resting nymph as it sinks or clings to the weed.

Damsel nymphs don't plummet headfirst to the bottom with their tail streaming behind in their wake. They sink slowly, at the same angle as they were swimming—their body is lifeless and rigid. When they settle they cling to the stones, wood or weed and sit motionless before either crawling or making their next calculated swim. They are ambush predators and limit the amount of time they spend swimming away from cover where they can easily be spotted.

JD DAMSEL

I wanted a fly that could be cast to a fish, that would slowly sink giving the fish time to recognise it, and that would be realistic enough to withstand scrutiny as it sat motionless on the weed or rocks before being



The distinctive body-shape and colouration of the real thing.

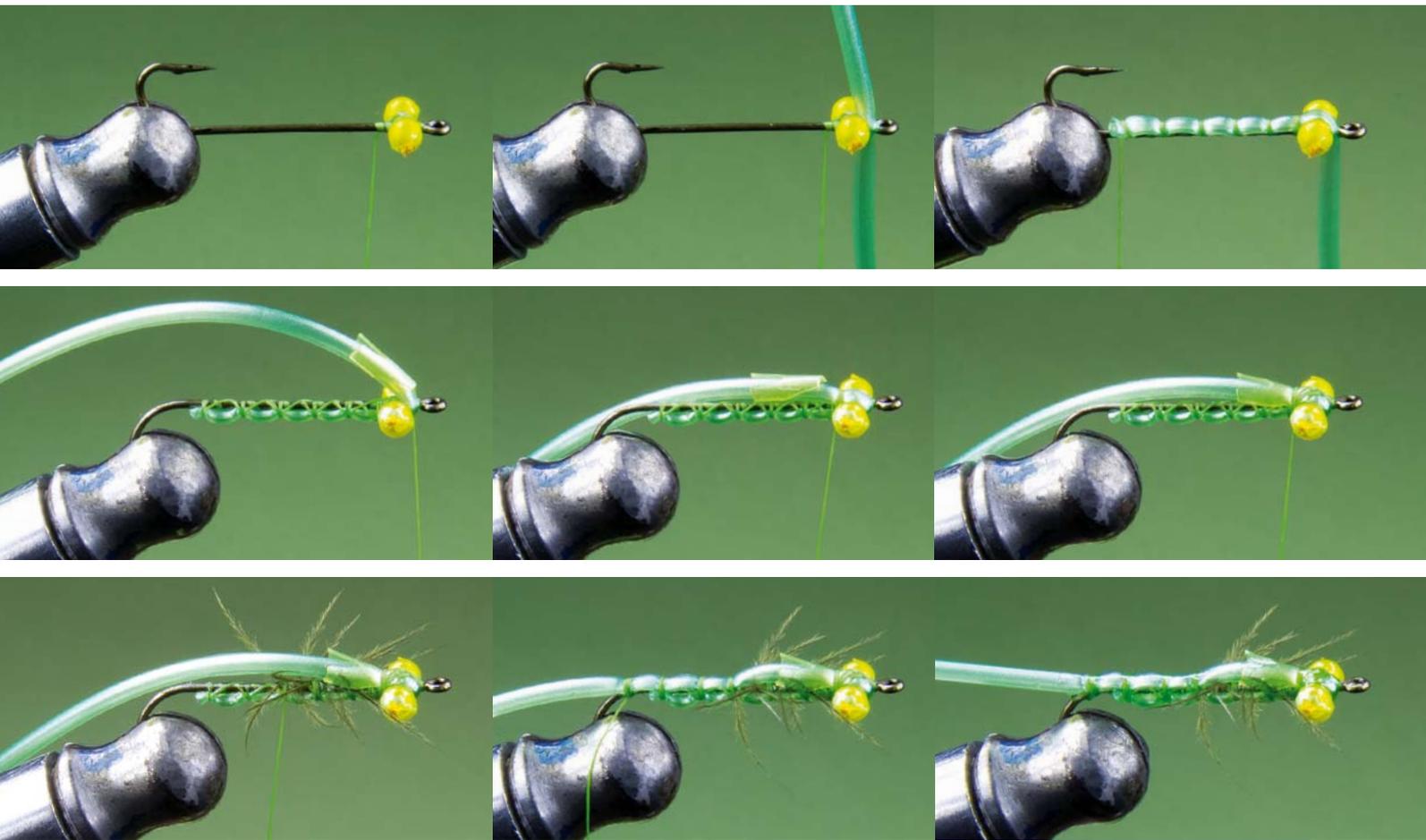
snatched up. Whenever I've fished these flies around the weeds, recognition is instant and fish will strike repeatedly all the way to the surface if you pull it away.

Now I'm not saying one pattern or fishing method is better than any other, just different, and capable of great things under the right circumstances.

As an ambush predator, damsel nymphs rely on camouflage. Their colours therefore are those of their

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Plastic Fantastic . . . continued



You don't want your fly to blend in too well.

environment—pale greens, tans and yellows.

They are usually between 1.5 and 3.5 cm long and live on plants, amongst stones and leaf litter at the bottom of ponds or slow-flowing parts of rivers. They do their best to blend in and hide to avoid being eaten, but as a fly tier your objectives are a little different. Don't be afraid to experiment with colours. I have used pale purple and orange when visibility is reduced or when fishing over a darker bottom. Matching the hatch is one thing, but do you ever wonder what

happens to those misfits unable to blend in and hide?

TYING THE JD DAMSEL

Not all flies require triple figure hackles and the fiddliest of techniques. The JD Damsel is extremely cheap to make, fairly simple to tie and catches fish like nothing else under the right circumstances. Its success comes from how it looks and how it behaves in the water.

1. Place hook in vice upside-down. Tie in the eyes on top of hook shank directly behind the hook eye. Add a dab of nail varnish to the thread wraps to lock the eyes in position.
2. For use in faster or deeper water, tie in some fine lead wire at the bend and wrap forward to within 5mm of the hook eye. Overwrap the lead wire with thread to finish behind the eye of the hook.
3. Lay the nylon tube along the hook shank so that the tag end finishes 5mm before the bend of the hook. With a needle or awl, pierce through the tube at the point where the eye of the hook is. Using this hole, slip the

YOU WILL NEED

- Size 10 bronze long-shank hook.*
- Hollow nylon tube (kids weave this into bracelets etc).*
- Pearl white plastic bead chain (blind cord) coloured with permanent markers.*
- Strong tying thread in a colour to suit the tubing.*
- Lead wire (optional).*
- Translucent green nail polish, head cement or similar.*
- Sharp fine pointed scissors.*
- Emu hackle with barbules long enough to look like legs.*

tube over the eye of the hook to sit against the eyes.

4. Fold the tube back over the eyes and, while pulling it tight, tie down directly behind the eyes with a couple of tight thread wraps.

5. Lifting the tube, make one diagonal wrap on the shank to move the thread down the hook. Hold the tube down and tie it down at this point creating a body segment. Continue creating segments like this until you reach the end. Fasten the end of the tube down with thread for a neat finish. Keep the segments spaced apart to avoid obscuring the body colour and

transparency. Wrap forward to eye of hook keeping the thread moving forward on the top of the shank and the wraps falling between the segments, not across them.

6. Turn hook over in vice.

7. For the wing-case, cut a small (7mm) length of tube (I like a slightly different colour to the body to make it stand out, but any will do). Pinching it flat, cut a corner (2mm) off each end on opposite sides. Slip one of the scissor blades inside the tube and slide the tube up until the V of one of the cuts you made is in the jaws of the scissors. Cut along the length of the tube and open it out flat.

8. Lay the wing-case, pointed end towards eyes, over the tube behind the eyes and allow to close around it. Slide the wing-case forward so that its pointed end lays over the eyes and tie in with figure eight wraps. Finish with a couple of tight thread turns behind the eyes. This should pinch the wing-case slightly upwards.

9. Pull the length of tube forward so the wing-case and tube are over the eye of the hook and the over-wrapped lead wire is visible.

10. Cut the tip off an emu hackle feather. Cut the first two pairs of barbules close to the feather stem. Lay this flat along the top of the hook shank and tie in the bared tip of the feather. The legs should start immediately behind the eyes. Count down at least three pairs of opposing barbules for legs and cut another

two pairs of barbules from the feather stem below this point. Lift the tubes and emu feather out of the way and progress the thread down the shank to the point where the barbules were removed. Tie the feather down, and cut the rest of the feather off. Add a very small amount of nail varnish to the stem of the feather and the thread wraps to secure. Avoid getting any on the barbules or they'll stick together. The barbules should be roughly pointing out the sides of the fly.

11. Fold the tube down over the legs and make sure the wing-case is sitting flat on the back, rather than pointing up or forward.

12. With the tube pushed slightly back towards the eye so it rises up very slightly off the hook shank, tie down the tube behind the legs.

13. Lift the tube slightly to pass the thread underneath and wrap segments in line with those on the underside of the hook. When you reach the hook bend, fix the thread at this point with a whip finish.

14. Cut the protruding tube approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the shank length back from the bend of the hook. Pinch the end flat vertically and cut an angled section from the top and bottom. This section should be 3mm long and 1mm deep and be identical top and bottom. Push your finger between the two sides of the tube end to splay them out like gills.

15. Coat all thread wraps, eyes and gaps between upper and lower body

in nail varnish, work nail varnish underneath the wing case and use a bodkin to push the wing-case flat. It should stick slightly up by virtue of the way it was tied in. Avoid filling in the ridges between body segments. Let it dry.

FISHING THE JD DAMSEL

During cooler months damsel nymphs are best fished very slowly, close to the bottom with a sinking line. As the water starts to warm though, damsel nymphs become more active and hunt around the weeds. This is where I prefer to use them, particularly when I can sight-fish them.

The fly is relatively light so it can be cast to cruising fish. This visual fishing can be incredibly exciting. Fish that are cruising the weed beds are already on the lookout for these little creatures and when they spot them, it's like someone flicks a switch—they just fall all over themselves trying to snaffle them up. To avoid spooking the fish, cast well ahead, and as the fish approaches, give the fly a small twitch and then let it sit. You shouldn't need to wait long!

If you're blind casting, give the fly several very short strips then let it settle and wait. The fly sinks slowly and evenly, not head or tail first. Fish will often take the fly as it sinks or as it lies motionless on the weeds.

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Simple materials and tools are all that's required.